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The Ministry from the Layman's Viewpoint

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THE MINISTRY FROM THE

LAYMAN'S VIEWPOINT

BY

CHARLES C. CHAPMAN

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First Lecture

THE MINISTER

The ministry is a calling of great dignity and honor. No occupation, profession or calling followed by man is so exalted. I congratulate you for having chosen it. It was my own desire to be a minister, and I was urged to be by Elder E. H. Franklin of the Church at Macomb, Ill., of which I was a member, but was unable to raise the necessary \$100.00 to enable me to enter Eureka College.

Phillip Brooks in addressing a class of young men preparing for the ministry said - "Among all the good things in life you have chosen the best in having chosen the Christian ministry. You will get a larger measure of real happiness out of the life as a minister of the Gospel than in any other calling or occupation you might choose to follow, - that is, providing you are faithful to the end.

There is a dearth of young men in all communions preparing themselves for the ministry. The fields are enlarging and there are not sufficient competent men to fill the increasing demand. We are also told that we may look for still greater shortage, as there is only a limited number in our colleges and universities preparing for the ministry.

We are amazed when we pause and think how the great program for the redemption of the race has been left to man to execute. God in boundless love sent His Son; Jesus came, lived awhile here on our earth; told man about the Father, and taught him how to live; died on the cross as God's sacrificial Lamb; was buried in a new rock hewn grave and the third day arose. Forty days later Jesus returned to the Father and His Heavenly Home, first, however, committing to His followers the task of going into all the world and telling what all this meant, - that He came to win the race back to unity with God, but left to His followers the herculean task of its full consummation.

Yes, God must wait upon man to consummate the plan for the world's redemption. The amazing fact is the dependence of God upon man for this. There is no other plan revealed than that God must wait upon man to finish the work He so gloriously began. He who is able to form worlds and all that is wonderful and beautiful in them, must wait on poor, weak man to carry on this program for the redemption of the race which cost Him so much. He cannot even change the small community morally without man's cooperation. He must have His messengers, so He first chose the twelve. Romans 10:13-15; "How beautiful are the feet of those, etc." So we see that every point of contact between the Divine and the human reveals this dependence upon man. Therefore, what a responsibility rests with man whom the Creator endowed with some of His own Divine faculties and therefore, has a right to call upon him to help in this great program.

I am happy that you have had the courage and the consecration to dedicate your lives to this great task. You have accepted Jesus as your Saviour and His life and teaching your guide and have carefully and prayerfully thought about how best you can devote your life toward bringing present and eternal salvation to many and to help make the spirit of Jesus dominant in human society, and have decided that as a minister of Christ you can best serve Him and the world. As a minister you will be able to acquaint others with that which has come into your life and given you joy and assurance. That is a noble purpose. Yes, the noblest purpose to which anyone can dedicate his life.

You have decided not only to be His mouthpiece to preach the Gospel, but that your life shall be an example to others, showing them how they ought to live. Jesus Himself, as the Ambassador of God to this world, lived the manner of life a divine being - God incarnate, would live. His life a beautiful example to you, now you must likewise, as His servant, His ambassador, live the Christ life, - have His mind and His spirit. You are here to both learn the art of preaching the Gospel and ministering to a congregation of Disciples in a proper and fitting way, but you are yourself to learn more perfectly to live the Christian life. You must grow in grace as well as knowledge, - grow to appreciate sacred and holy things and have a proper reverence for them. Develop a devoted prayer life. If all this is your souls' rich experience, your preaching will be powerful and effective; without this you will not be rejoiced to see multitudes converted under your preaching. Paul said to Timothy, - "Be Thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity."

This means that you will not longer think first of how you can live the easiest and most comfortable life, or gain worldly honor and riches. The ministry is the most sacred calling followed by man. As the minister of Jesus, you must permit nothing in life to so attract you, so win your affections, that you will compromise your purpose to make Jesus and His ministry first. Have a passion for preaching and with Paul say - "This one thing I do", "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." "If so be that ye suffer with him that we may be also glorified together."

You must be ambitious, - not to be the most eloquent preacher in your community, or the most popular citizen, though it is your duty to strive to preach well and to have a high standing in the community. You ought to be ambitious to be a worthy ambassador of Jesus; to live as a minister of Christ so that your life would be a near replica of the life of Christ while He lived here. Be ambitious to be a true and faithful minister. Led on by this desire and if you are true to Jesus, you will find every other good thing in life will come your way. Without ambition of the right kind one never gets very far on the highway of life. This way is often steep and rugged, and you will become tired and weary and discouraged and ready to say with some, - "Is it worth it?" "Why not take the broad and easy way and go with the crowd?"

At such moments a laudable desire, ambition to reach the peak where but few are found, will fire you and give you needed strength. I am not unmindful that you must ever seek for strength from Jesus.

I honor you for entering a calling which has no financial outlook for you, - is poorly paid, but one that will enrich you in self-denying work. You must be poor and remain so, but by your teaching you point to others the highway of life leading to riches, respectability and happiness providing they rightly walk therein. While preachers are now paid larger salaries than formerly, they are not adequately paid. They are expected to dress well, take splendid care of their families, entertain often and answer many calls for financial help, all on a modest salary. It is most difficult under these circumstances for them to lay by anything for the future. Provision is being made for their old age or when becoming incapacitated. Of this I will speak later.

If during your years of training and after taking an honest and unprejudiced analysis of your progress, of your qualifications, of your yearning, you are in some doubt as to your fitness for the ministry, have a frank talk with Prof. Shaw. He will honestly and frankly tell you whether in his opinion you should proceed or abandon your purpose and turn to some other calling. If you have ability and are making progress, he will tell you so. If, on the other hand, he clearly sees that you do not have those qualities so essential to a

successful ministry and have little prospects of developing them, he will also tell you so. This need be no reflection upon you. Everyone is not qualified for the ministry by natural abilities, any more than for the law, medicine, architecture or for art. The ministry calls for unconditional surrender of all other leads and ambitions. Unless you are willing to make this surrender, you should seek some other calling. Clear away all doubt now. Go to God in earnest prayer, asking Him to point the way so unmistakably that there will no longer be doubt in your mind.

While you have thought much and deeply on this question of devoting your life to the ministry, you do not yet know the real needs of men, - men in their ignorance and superstition, indifference and prejudice, struggles and sin. You are young and have not seen much of life. I am persuaded, however, that you have seen enough and know enough that men everywhere are in a sad plight and you have the unqualified conviction that Christ is both sufficient and necessary for all these needs.

Believing this, then the dominating purpose of your life is to make Jesus real and vital in the lives of people and not to share the superficial and selfish pleasures of the world, but rather the sacrificial glories of the Triumphant Christ. Human life cannot be lived to a more glorious purpose. Entered upon this holy and sacred ministry, you must keep yourself pure from whatever would stain your life and in any way hinder your purpose. You must have an unblemished character. In word and deed you must be clean and pure.

I have known ministers who were careless of speech often telling stories that were questionable, and some whose lives were not clean. A community soon learns this. You cannot hide from the keen eyes of your neighbor anything you do which would furnish scandal or gossip. Men, as well as women, seem to enjoy relating any scandal about a preacher.

Cowper said this years ago,
 "I venerate the man whose heart is warm,
 Whose hands are pure, whose doctrines and
 whose life
 Coincident, exhibit lucid proof
 That he is honest in the sacred cause."

You will often meet with opposition, disappointment, be discouraged and borne down by the weights of your ministry. You will be nettled and disheartened by the inconsistencies of shallow and foolish people; you will be criticized; your faith may be questioned, and even concerted action of your brethren be taken against you. You will go down under this great burden unless you have strength and wisdom given you by Jesus. He has promised to do this. If you have shared the truth and love of Christ in prayer, you will find His grace will be sufficient in any emergency. Keep close to Jesus, - Nay, as He says, "If you abide in Me, I will abide in you and you shall bear much fruit." Grow like Jesus. Have his mind and spirit.

You will form strong, lasting and happy friendships that will be most helpful to you during your time of stress and sorrow, and furnish an abiding joy at all times. Seek out among your people those you can love and confide in. You will grow to love the church and your holy calling more and more if you are faithful and true ministers of the Word and loyal ambassadors of Jesus.

Be consistent in life and message. To be one person in the pulpit and quite a different person out of it will make your ministry a failure. Be

consistent as a preacher. Don't be a radical or a conservative. Keep in the middle of the road, as we say. Don't be attracted by any of the popular religious cults, or take up any of the fads of the day. Keep your head and hold steadily to your course. Guard against over-balanced piety. I have known some who lost their influence by wearing long faces and frowning upon everything not religious.

So often ministers adopt questionable means to fill their churches. Great numbers and big things appeal to them and they will resort to methods inconsistent with the spirit and program of Jesus and the Apostles to attain popularity and attract crowds. Don't be ambitious to be a "live wire" - a "great hit." I am downright ashamed of some of our preachers who try to excite the public with their ability. Received an advertisement from a preacher which said, - "Take me quick, - greatest hit of the day."

Sow the seed, either with joy or with tears and then enlighten your people with good Gospel sermons, trusting in God to give the increase, all the while yourself living a Godly life, consistent with your calling and your message. The world needs more men of that type to dedicate their lives to the ministry. We need a ministry that is commanding, compelling, that will present the saving Gospel to a perishing world; a ministry full of faith and guided by the Spirit and so cultured that it can preach with mighty power and an unfaltering tongue on the Old Gospel; who will dress the message so attractively that the mind in this modern day can understand it; who will free it from rubbish of worldly dogma and make it clear, this previous truth, as it is Jesus; a ministry made up of men like the Master, who can lay the warm sympathetic hand upon the sorrowing, the wretched, the sin cursed, and impart to them spiritual life.

When you have finished your task, may it be said, you have kept the faith and may have the blessed assurance that yours will be a glittering crown of righteousness given you by your Prophet, Priest and King, in whose name and for whose sake and service you devoted your life. May this or a similar epitaph be above your final resting place - "The Preacher of the Word of God, and the Friend of Man."

Dr. Holland put in beautiful verse a fine description of the faithful minister:

He knows but Jesus Christ, the crucified,
Ah, little rocks the worldling of the worth
Of such a man as this upon the earth;
Who gives himself - his all, to make men wise
In doctrines which his life exemplifies.

The years pass on, and a great multitude
Still find in him a character whose light
Shines round him like a candle in the night;
And recognize a presence so benign,
That to the Godless even it seems Divine.

He bears his people's love within his heart,
And envies no man, whatsoever his part.
His Church's record grows, and grows again,
With names of saintly women-folks and men.
And many a worldling, many a wayward youth,
He counts among the trophies of his truth.

O! Happy man! There is no man like thee,
Worn out in service of humanity.
And dead at last, 'mid universal tears,
Thy name a fragrance in the speaker's breath,
And thy divine example life in death.